



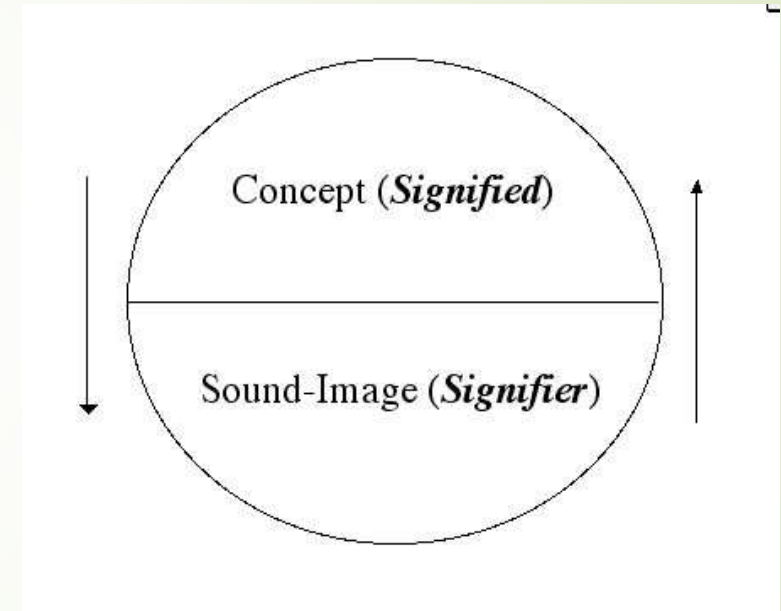
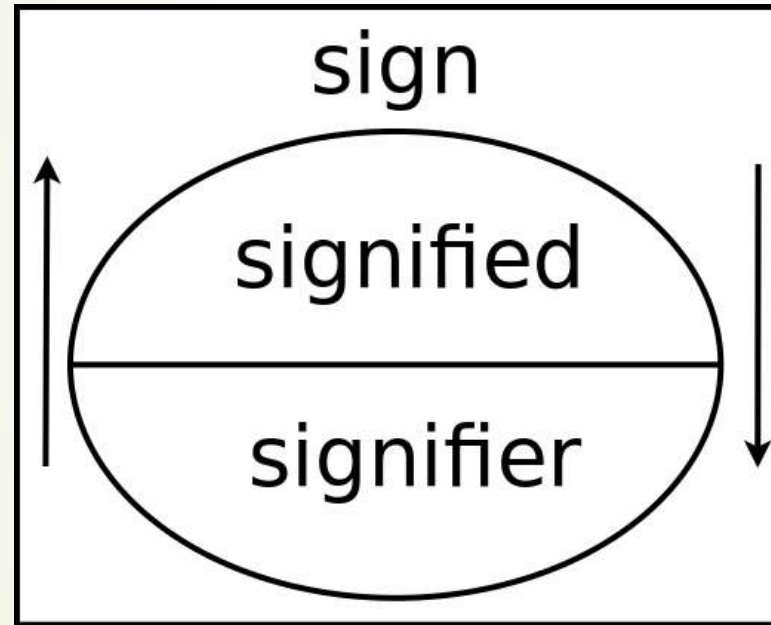
Structuralism

Literary Theory



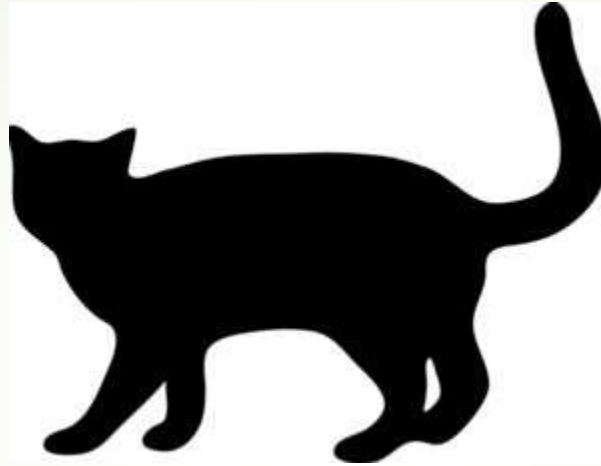
Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913)

Course in General Linguistics



Cat

Signifier



Signified



Referent



**Words and Language are arbitrary.
Language is a convention.**



Semiotics/Semiology is the study of signs

Semiotics and structuralism are used in psychoanalysis, Marxism, feminism etc.



Signs can be understood/studied
through difference and opposition





Difference


- ▶ What does “ton” mean in Turkish?
- ▶ 1000 kilos? Tuna fish? Tone? And what kind of tone?
- ▶ We need context.
- ▶ Syntagm: “The cat chased a mouse”
- ▶ Signs make sense because of their position/relation (train example)



Binary Oppositions

- Good VS Evil
 - Civilization VS Nature
 - Loyalty VS Betrayal
 - North VS South
 - Male VS Female
 - Day VS Night
 - White VS Black
 - Green VS Red
 - Fast VS Slow
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Langue VS Parole

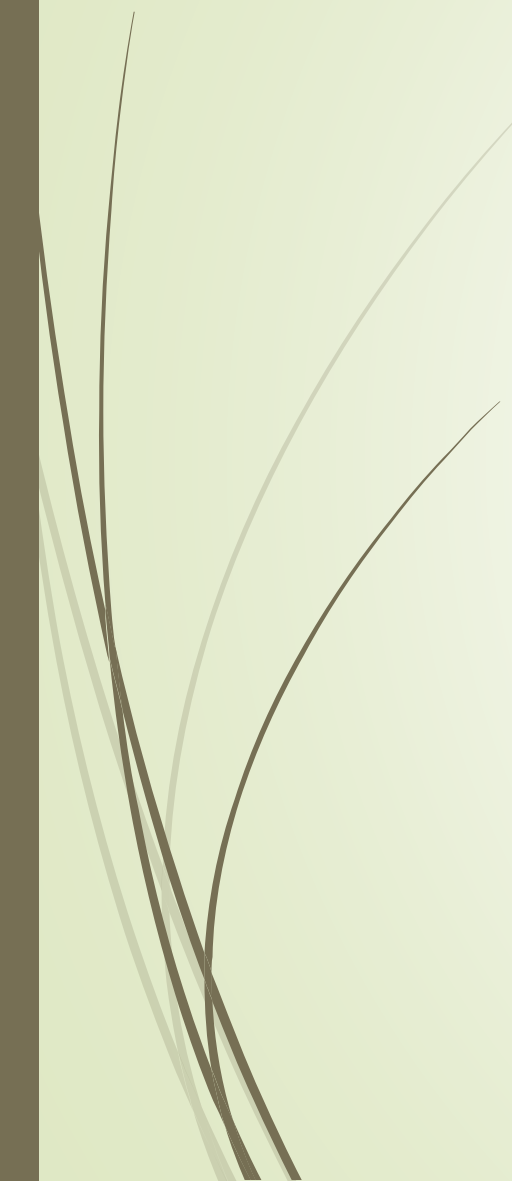


“Langue” (language) is the system/structure and “Parole” (speech) is the example

Other examples of langue and parole?

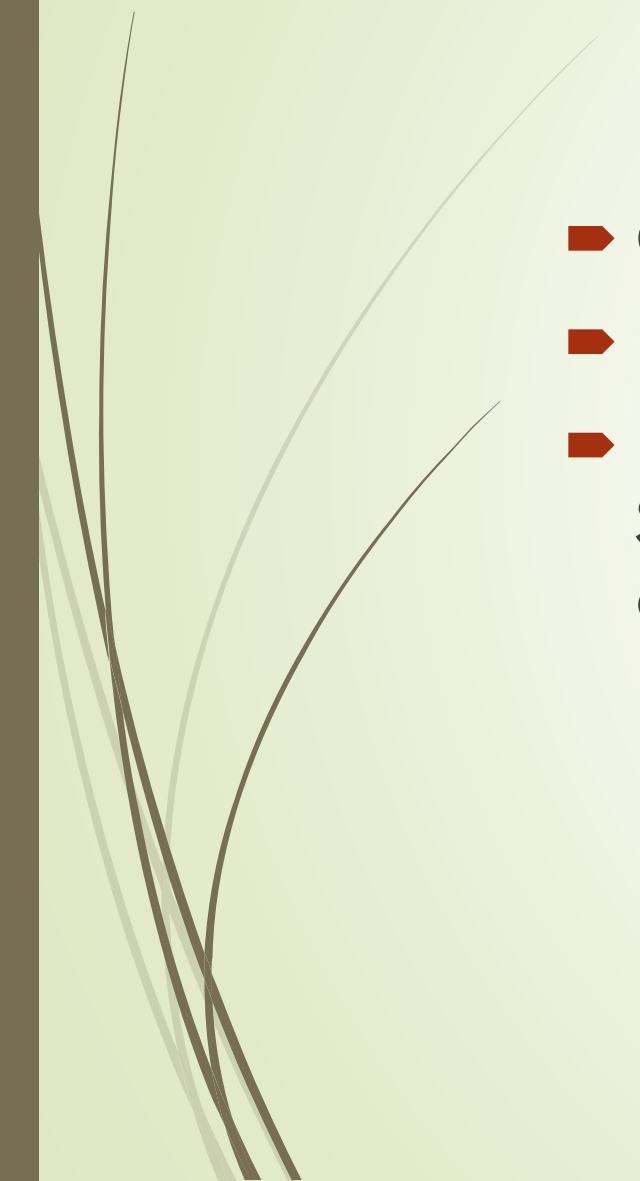


According to Structuralism

- ▶ Language **structures** our perception of the world
 - ▶ Reality exists in the language
 - ▶ We believe that we control language but a structuralist would say that language controls us (determinism)
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Famous structuralists

- Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009)
 - Roland Barthes (1915-1980)
 - Roland Barthes is regarded to have introduced Post-Structuralism in 1967-1968 with his short essay “The Death of the Author”
- 



Examples of Structuralism



Vladimir Propp (Russian Formalism)

- ▶ Studied Russian folktales
 - ▶ 7 characters (the hero, the villain, the princess, the helper etc.)
 - ▶ 31 functions
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Claude Lévi-Strauss (Structural Anthropology)

- ▶ Tried to find the underlying principles of different cultures (same langue, different paroles)
- ▶ He examined myths from different cultures
- ▶ Found a limited number of “mythemes”
- ▶ Example of a mytheme: The hero killed the monster

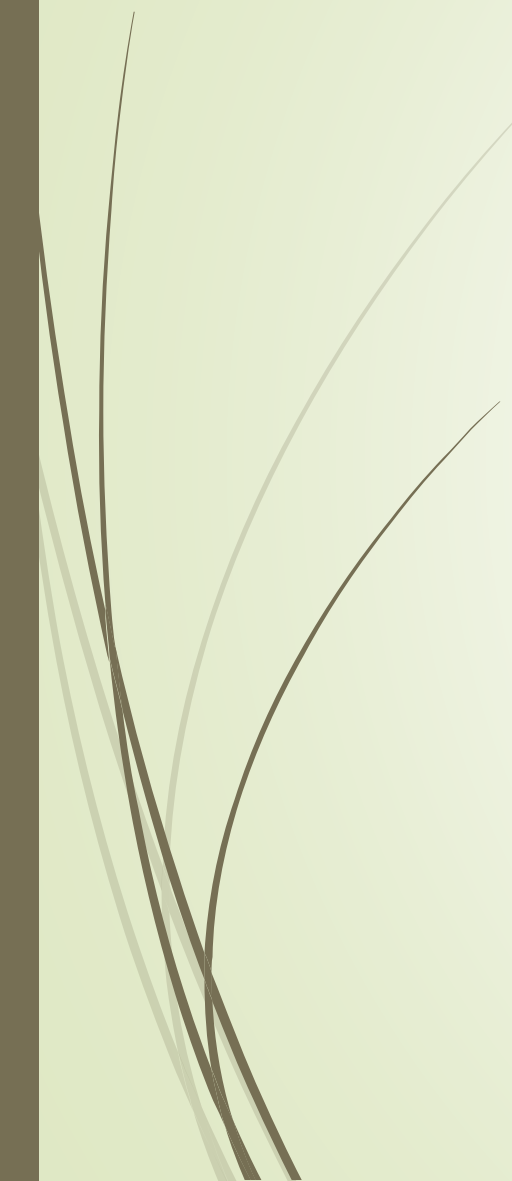


Roland Barthes (semiotics)

- ▶ Among other things he studied the signs of pop culture
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Reading Literature

- ▶ According to Johnathan Culler we consciously or unconsciously internalize the rules and codes that help us understand literature (the convention of distance, the process of naturalization, the rule of significance, the rule of metaphorical coherence, the rule of thematic unity)
 - ▶ Does this mean we all have the same interpretation of a text?
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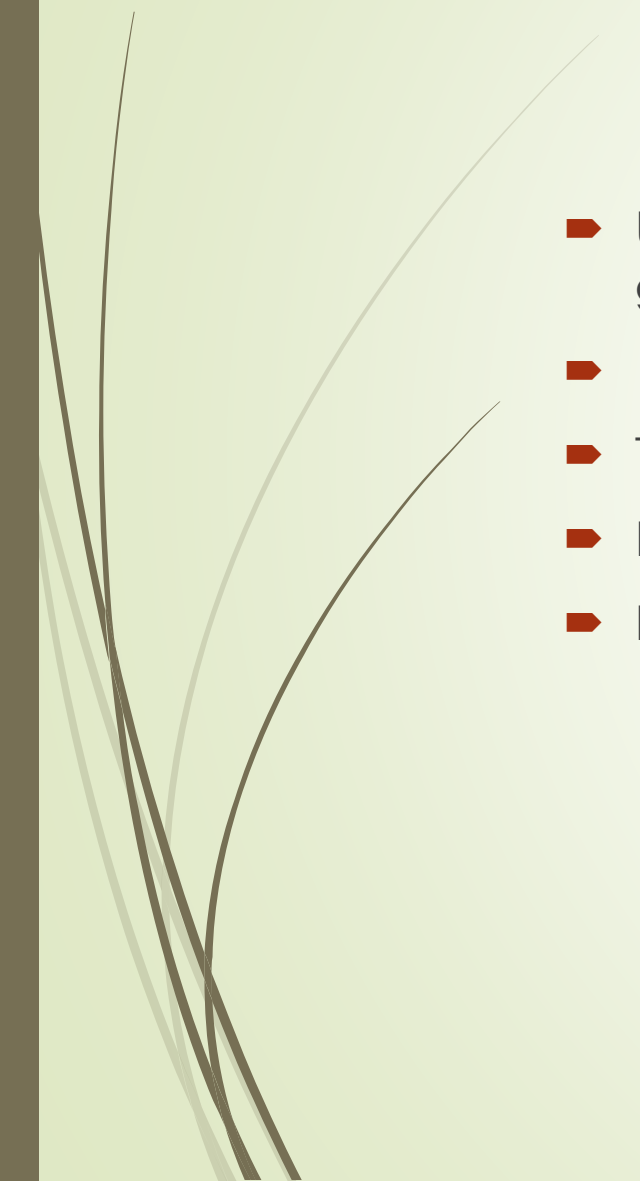


What do structuralists do?

- ▶ They are not interested in *what* a text means, but in *how* a text means what it means
- ▶ Either study a lot of stories to find the underlying principles or one story to discover how it conveys the underlying principles
- ▶ They study the *genre*
- ▶ They believe in the universality of human consciousness
- ▶ They study signs synchronically and diachronically
- ▶ They look for binary oppositions
- ▶ They look for deep structures
- ▶ Signs are very complicated so structuralists accept that they can only do their best



Objections?

- ▶ Unlike New Critics who focus on the detail of a text, Structuralists focus on general concepts and structures
 - ▶ They don't take the author into consideration
 - ▶ They may simplify texts by relating them to deep structures
 - ▶ Binary oppositions tend to be limited
 - ▶ Post-structuralism arrived too fast
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Part II

Structuralism in Practice



Binary Oppositions and Deep Structures in...



What is the “langue” here?



Examine a sign synchronically and diachronically

